

Gulls Around a Swiss Autoroute

Driving on the Autoroute from Lausanne to Geneva on 20 August 1978, starting from the Lausanne end at about 1530 hours local time, my wife and I noted an unusually large aggregation of gulls—probably Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) and Common Gulls (*Larus canus*)—flying animatedly in all directions and mostly at about 10–50 metres above the ground some twelve kilometres from Lausanne. The gulls were mostly whirling above and on both sides of the Autoroute as we passed. Like the Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*), Kites (*Milvus* spp.), and other birds of prey which are commonly to be observed from the Autoroute, they seemed to take no notice of us as we passed, or even of much larger and noisier vehicles than ours. We estimated the (uncountable because of criss-crossing and what I can only describe as ‘whirling’ flights) total number of gulls visible at a time, and mostly concentrated over an area of a few hundred square metres, as being between 120 and 200.

About 10 km farther on we drove through (mostly under) a similar but rather larger aggregation that could have numbered as many as 300, and then again, about 10 km farther on, we came upon yet another gull aggregation of similar size etc. in which the birds were again flying in seemingly all directions as if they were being chronically disturbed. At a similar distance further on once more we noted a fourth, rather similar aggregation and, at comparable distances after that, two more smaller ones of still at least sixty and probably nearer 100 gulls each—the last being only a few kilometres before Geneva. Finally, as we approached the International Airport, there was yet another, smaller flock of gulls also flying animatedly in all directions. Although this last flock was only about 30–50

birds strong, it could have constituted a serious hazard to aircraft (cf. Solman, 1973, 1978).

When we arrived at our apartment in a ‘concrete jungle’ near the end of the Autoroute, no gulls or birds of prey were to be seen although usually there are a few around at many times of the day. According to a well-known local ornithologist, the animated aggregations of gulls which we observed were doubtless taking advantage of a massive hatching of insects, though neither he nor the local museum entomologist knew what these insects were likely to be.

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References

- SOLMAN, V.E.F. (1973). Birds and aircraft. *Biological Conservation*, 5(2), pp. 79–86, 4 figs.
- SOLMAN, V.E.F. (1978). Gulls and aircraft. *Environmental Conservation*, 5(4), pp. 277–81.
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WWF Grants Rise Above 100 Million Swiss Francs

Grants for nature conservation made by the World Wildlife Fund since its foundation in 1961 have now topped 100 million Swiss francs. The grants reached S.frs. 100,615,901 on 31 August and went principally to 2,016 projects to save endangered species of animals and plants, and natural areas threatened by industrial or other development or pollution.

Tigers, both Asian and African Elephants, Polar Bears, Orang-utan, Vicuñas, and various species of deer, eagles, cranes, geese, turtles, and crocodiles, are among the animals which have benefitted from financial assistance from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This has been carried out with the scientific advice and guidance of its sister organization, the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), which itself receives substantial WWF support for its work as the leading international scientific conservation organization.

To help save some of the last wild areas of the world, WWF has provided aid for land purchase, equipment, staff training, and scientific work, involving 260 national parks and reserves in 80 countries on five continents. These altogether cover an area of 1,300,000 square kilometres—equal to France, West Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, all combined, or nearly twice the size of Texas. They include the Coto Doñana in Spain; Camargue in France; Seewinkel-Neusiedl in Austria; wetlands in Britain and Czechoslovakia; Nakuru in Kenya; Serengeti in Tanzania; Ouadi Rime-Ouadi Achim in Chad; Manu in Amazonian Peru; Monteverde Cloud-forest in Costa Rica; La Macarena in Colombia; New Jersey Wetlands in the United States; a network of 16 tiger reserves in India,

Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh; Leuser in Indonesia; Khao Yai in Thailand, and Fjordland in New Zealand.

Large-scale support has been given to the Galápagos National Park, the Ecuadorian island group which is a ‘living museum of evolution’ in which Charles Darwin found inspiration and help towards consolidating the theory of evolution which he subsequently described so effectively.

Some of the major fund-raising campaigns that have been carried out by the World Wildlife Fund include those for the Tiger, Lake Nakuru, and tropical rain-forests. Currently the major campaign, with the slogan ‘The Seas Must Live’, is for conservation of marine life and of the wealth of the seas, both of which are essential to future human well-being.

The World Wildlife Fund raises its funds from the public, and does not receive government grants; instead it encourages governments and other authorities to put funds directly into nature conservation in their own countries. There are now 27 national organizations (formerly styled ‘appeals’) of WWF: in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Luxembourg, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Venezuela. The international secretariat is at Morges, in the Canton de Vaud, on the shores of Lake Geneva.

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